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Special Committee on the Situation with regard to the Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples

Resumed session

Summary record of the 5th meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 15 June 2009, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Natalegawa ..... (Indonesia)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.30 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

1. *The agenda was adopted.*

2. **The Chairman** informed the Committee that the delegations of Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama and Uruguay wished to participate in the substantive session of the Special Committee as observers.

Special Committee decision of 9 June 2008 concerning Puerto Rico (A/AC.109/2009/L.7 and L.13)

3. **The Chairman** informed the Committee that the delegations of Nicaragua, Guatemala and Panama wished to participate in the Committee's consideration of the item as observers.

Draft resolution A/AC.109/2009/L.7

4. **Mr. Moreno** (Cuba), introducing draft resolution A/AC.109/2009/L.7, said that it, inter alia, stressed the urgent need for the Government of the United States of America to expedite a process that would allow the Puerto Rican people to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination; expressed concern that despite the diverse initiatives taken by the political representatives of Puerto Rico, a process of decolonization that would satisfy the Puerto Rican people's aspirations had not yet been set in motion; reiterated that the Puerto Rican people constituted a Latin American and Caribbean nation that had its own unequivocal national identity; referred to the principle that any initiative for the solution of the political status of Puerto Rico should originate from the people of Puerto Rico; and urged the Government of the United States to complete the return to the Puerto Rican people of occupied land and installations on Vieques Island and in Ceiba, and to expedite the cleaning up and decontamination of areas used in military exercises. The draft resolution expressed serious concern regarding actions carried out against Puerto Rican independence fighters, called once more for the release of Puerto Rican political prisoners held in United States prisons, and requested the General Assembly to consider the question of Puerto Rico comprehensively in all its aspects. He hoped that the draft resolution would be adopted by consensus.

Hearing of petitioners

5. **The Chairman** drew attention to the further requests for hearing contained in the addendum to aide-mémoire 09.09. He took it that the Special Committee wished to accede to those requests.

6. *It was so decided.*

7. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Hernández González (Colegio de Abogados de Puerto Rico) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

8. **Mr. Hernández González** (Colegio de Abogados de Puerto Rico) said that, despite international instruments to which it was party and the resolutions of the General Assembly and the Special Committee, the United States of America had done nothing to address the colonial situation of Puerto Rico and had repeatedly rejected Puerto Rican initiatives for greater sovereignty. His organization rejected the United States proposal of a referendum, and advocated a constitutional assembly on status to define alternatives to colonialism in line with international law.

9. He denounced the continued incarceration of Puerto Rican political prisoners, who were serving sentences in United States prisons, that were out of proportion to their offences, and expressed concern over the application by United States prosecutors of the death penalty in Puerto Rico although that ran counter to Puerto Rico's Constitution. He urged the Committee to condemn United States Government intervention in Puerto Rico's daily life and electoral processes, including physical attacks by Federal Bureau of Investigation agents on journalists and the arbitrary prosecution of supporters of independence and Governor Acevedo Vilá. Also of concern were the failure of the United States Government to honour its commitment to clean-up of Vieques bombing range and the installation of a military surveillance radar station on Vieques, ostensibly to combat drug trafficking, that in fact made the Territory a potential target.

10. He urged the Special Committee to recommend that the question of Puerto Rico be referred to the General Assembly and that the Assembly should refer the matter to the International Court of Justice to request an advisory opinion on the illegality of the United States presence in Puerto Rico. It should stress that a constitutional assembly on status was the appropriate mechanism to bring about Puerto Rico's decolonization.

11. *Mr. Hernández González withdrew.*

12. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Martín (Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

13. **Mr. Martín** (Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño) said that the end of the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism in 2010 and the two-hundredth anniversary of independence movements in Latin America could be motivation enough for Latin America and the Caribbean States to force the United States of America to end colonialism in Puerto Rico by bringing the issue before the General Assembly. That would have been unthinkable during the Cold War. The United States Congress would then come under moral and legal pressure to comply with its decolonization obligations under international law.

14. *Mr. Martín withdrew.*

15. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Susler (National Lawyers' Guild International Committee) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

16. **Ms. Susler** (National Lawyers' Guild International Committee), after describing the reintegration into society of Puerto Rican political prisoners released in 1999, and the suffering of those who were still detained, urged the Committee to recommend that the General Assembly should adopt a resolution on the question of Puerto Rico. She called on the United States Government to put an end to the criminalization of, and attacks on the Puerto Rican Independence movement; release all Puerto Rican political prisoners; quash the grand jury subpoenas and stop using the grand jury as a tool for repression; identify and prosecute the assassins of militants of the Independence movement; withdraw United States police and military forces from Puerto Rico; withdraw from and clean-up Vieques and compensate its people; stop applying the death penalty in Puerto Rico; and to formally commit to negotiate in good faith with the people of Puerto Rico a solution to the island's colonial status.

17. *Ms. Susler withdrew.*

18. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Ramos (American Association of Jurists) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

19. **Ms. Ramos** (American Association of Jurists) said that her organization was firmly committed to the eradication of colonialism and supported the draft resolution. Puerto Rican culture was under attack. While ethnicity was not considered a determining factor in the formation of States, it was the most important factor for minorities suffering discrimination because of their ethnic or national origin and culture. The lack of sustainable development, to which all peoples had a right, and the preservation of Puerto Rican culture and identity were both closely linked to the colonial situation, since almost all aspects of life in Puerto Rico were controlled by the United States of America for its own benefit.

20. Even though the United States Navy had ceased its military activities in Vieques, it continued "decontaminating" the island using unsafe methods. People living near decommissioned United States military bases in Puerto Rico had not been informed about the toxic substances left behind.

21. The current administration, which was not concerned about the health of the inhabitants of Vieques or Puerto Ricans, planned to hand over basic services to private companies. The Government of Puerto Rico, with the backing of the United States Government, was attempting to change the administrative system that had protected Puerto Rico's culture, environment and community services. Irreparable damage had been done to the archaeological site at Jácanas, among others, by the United States Army Corps of Engineers and United States archaeologists which, under the authority of the State Historic Preservation Office and the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources of Puerto Rico, had undertaken work in a manner that violated the laws of both Puerto Rico and the United States of America, as well as international agreements on the protection of cultural finds. The Governments of both nations had also agreed to cede control over sites of great significance to the Puerto Rican people, including the El Yunque tropical forest and the El Carso region to private companies. Another institution that was being jeopardized by the policies of the current administration of Puerto Rico was the Colegio de Abogados de Puerto Rico. Her organization opposed any attempt to disband that venerable organization.

22. Lastly, she reiterated the request for all Puerto Rican political prisoners to be released and appealed to the Committee to condemn colonialism in all its guises.

23. *Ms. Ramos withdrew.*

24. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Castillo (Partido Nacionalista de Puerto Rico) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

25. **Mr. Castillo** (Partido Nacionalista de Puerto Rico) said that colonialism was a crime against humanity that hindered development and called on all free countries to support Puerto Rico's fight for freedom and independence. The Committee's adoption of resolutions on Puerto Rico was key to raising awareness of Puerto Rico's right to self-determination and its claim for political and legal recognition as a nation.

26. Since Governor Luis Fortuño had taken office, more and more measures had been imposed in line with his wish to move Puerto Rico towards forced statehood, including the sale of Puerto Rico's public institutions. The Government of Puerto Rico had already sold off the public hospitals and the telecommunications company and planned to sell the university and public school premises to private companies. Roads and bridges would also be sold, while 60,000 government employees would be laid off. The Government of Luis Fortuño was riding roughshod over the Constitution of Puerto Rico and eliminating environmental protection laws in order to hand over land to developers for construction. There were also plans to replace civil service pension systems with private plans. Workers would no longer have collective agreements or rights since trade unions were also being abolished. The plan was to pillage Puerto Rico and turn it over to the United States through statehood. The United Nations should take measures to protect Puerto Rico from such an outrage.

27. Regardless of its statements at the United Nations, the United States of America had never intended to respect or even recognize the political sovereignty of the people of Puerto Rico. Indeed, the first step towards decolonization — the implementation of immediate measures to transfer all powers to the people of Puerto Rico without conditions or reservations — had not yet been taken. In Puerto Rico, there was increasing recognition, admiration and respect for national political figures who had laid down their lives for the cause and growing interest in the former president of the Partido Nacionalista de Puerto Rico. People from all political parties and social classes identified themselves as Puerto Rican.

28. Violations of human rights in Puerto Rico would only cease when it became a free and independent nation. When that goal was achieved, the administering Power should compensate Puerto Rico for the serious and irreparable damage that had been caused to its people and land. The people of Puerto Rico were counting on the support of the Committee, friends of Puerto Rico, and all nations that identified with their cause.

29. *Mr. Castillo withdrew.*

30. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Rivera Reyes (Organización Autonomista Pro Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico (PROELA)) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

31. **Mr. Rivera Reyes** (Organización Autonomista Pro Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico (PROELA)) said that his organization had spent 34 years fighting for Puerto Rico's right to self-determination. In 2008, the former Governor of Puerto Rico, Aníbal Acevedo Vilá, who was at that time president of the *Partido Popular Democrático*, had told the Committee about the development in the relations between the two countries, affirming the sovereignty of Puerto Rico. However, some high-level members of the party had publicly disagreed with its official position.

32. His organization believed that political and economic relations between Puerto Rico and the United States of America must be based on a clear recognition of the sovereignty of Puerto Rico and of its inalienable right to self-determination. In that regard, Puerto Rico could either opt for free association or for the fourth option set out in the annex to General Assembly resolution 2625 (XXV) — any other political status freely determined by the people.

33. PROELA endorsed the Secretary-General's call for the Committee to accelerate its work during the last years of the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism to achieve concrete results. The international community had a duty to consider the question of Puerto Rico and to preserve and defend the general principles of international law, including the principle of the *erga omnes* right to self-determination and the principle of sovereign equality.

34. The economic, social and psychological impact of the political situation in Puerto Rico was such that it affected peace and security. According to reports by the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA),

Puerto Rico had had the lowest economic growth in Latin America over the past two years. It was also experiencing an unprecedented surge in violence, with a higher murder rate than many countries embroiled in armed conflict. Colonialism had not equipped Puerto Rico for a self-sufficient future; indeed, it lacked the infrastructure to cope with the challenges of economic globalization and the ensuing global financial crises.

35. He urged the Committee to recommend that the United States authorities should comply with their obligations regarding the right to self-determination, including their obligation to raise awareness of the issue. PROELA also endorsed the call made in previous Committee resolutions for the question of Puerto Rico to be referred to the plenary of the General Assembly.

36. *Mr. Rivera Reyes withdrew.*

37. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Rivera (Puertorriqueños Unidos En Acción) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

38. **Mr. Rivera** (Puertorriqueños Unidos En Acción) said that 2010 would be an important year for the Committee, since it would mark the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of resolution 1514 (XV). During those 50 years, 14 current members of the Committee had achieved independence. While 2010 would also mark the end of the Second International Decade for the Eradication of Colonialism, the process of decolonization was still incomplete in Puerto Rico and 16 other countries. Referring the question of Puerto Rico to the plenary of the General Assembly was the only realistic way of resolving Puerto Rico's colonial status. The solutions offered by the United States were simply intended to obstruct the work of the Committee and confound global public opinion as to the political, economic and social power it wielded over the Puerto Rican people, whom it was obliging to submit to colonialism by consent. Sovereign powers should be transferred to the people of Puerto Rico so that they could freely exercise their right to self-determination, in accordance with resolution 1514 (XV), the declaration of the fourteenth Summit Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Countries and the proclamation adopted by the Latin American and Caribbean Congress in Solidarity with Puerto Rico's Independence.

39. Any resolution adopted by the Committee must reflect the reality of the Puerto Rican diaspora. Puerto Rico was one nation, united by a common language, culture and race, that had been divided by colonialism; the process of decolonization should reunite it. Puerto Rican political prisoners in United States jails were also part of the Puerto Rican diaspora. Those serving disproportionate prison sentences simply for their commitment to Puerto Rican independence and decolonization, who were being subjected to psychological pressure and physical abuse, should be released.

40. The time had come for Puerto Rico to become part of the wider Caribbean so future generations of Puerto Ricans could enjoy the same freedoms as all sovereign nations.

41. *Mr. Rivera withdrew.*

42. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Pesquera Sevillana (Movimiento Independentista Nacional Hostosiano) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

43. **Mr. Pesquera Sevillana** (Movimiento Independentista Nacional Hostosiano) said that, until Puerto Rico achieved independence, the freedom and democracy of the whole of Latin America and the Caribbean would not be complete. The recent Summit Conference of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Countries had taken a decision to support Puerto Rico's right to self-determination and independence and its request for the question of Puerto Rico to be considered by the Plenary of the General Assembly as a separate issue. The Committee should endorse that request. It was of the utmost importance that the General Assembly should request the United States of America to comply with international law with respect to Puerto Rico and allow eight million Puerto Ricans, including those living in the United States of America, to exercise their right to self-determination.

44. The legislation on Puerto Rico that had been submitted to the United States Congress was part of an annexation strategy based on the idea that Puerto Rico belonged to the United States of America. Nothing could be farther from the truth; Puerto Rico belonged to all Puerto Ricans and to nobody else. Puerto Rico had been under illegal occupation since the 1898 invasion and any action taken since then was illegal.

45. A constitutional assembly on status should be held, without the involvement of the United States of America, to move the decolonization process forward.

As a gesture of good faith, the United States Government should immediately and unconditionally release all Puerto Rican political prisoners. That Government should also acknowledge, and make reparation without delay for, the damage that had been done to the Puerto Rican nation over the course of more than a century of colonialism, including the pollution of the environment of Vieques Island following over 60 years of military exercises and the subsequent adverse impact on the health of its inhabitants.

46. The United States Government should stay out of the decolonization process. Resolving the colonial problem in Puerto Rico was not simply a matter of dignity and principle; it was absolutely necessary if the country was to tackle its serious economic, social and political problems. The establishment of the Commonwealth in 1952 had not led to any progress. On the contrary, the limited concessions to autonomy or self-government had since been dramatically restricted and there was severe and constant intervention by federal agencies in the daily lives of Puerto Ricans. Indeed, under new legislation proposed by the United States President, United States-owned factories in Puerto Rico would be subject to United States tax, resulting in the loss of some 100,000 jobs in the manufacturing industry.

47. *Mr. Pesquera Sevillana withdrew.*

48. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Reverón Collazo (Comité Puerto Rico en las Naciones Unidas) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

49. **Ms. Reverón Collazo** (Comité Puerto Rico en las Naciones Unidas) said that, since the adoption in 1953 of General Assembly resolution 748 (VIII), the United States of America had been able to behave as it wished with regard to Puerto Rico, without any international supervision whatsoever, while Puerto Rico had been prevented from participating directly as a sovereign country in international discussions. The Puerto Rican people's hopes that United States policy towards Puerto Rico would change with the election of President Obama had been dashed. The United States Government continued to argue that the case of Puerto Rico was an internal affair and to hide behind the lack of consensus among Puerto Ricans.

50. With the adoption in 1960 of resolution 1514 (XV), pro-independence Puerto Ricans had begun to work to ensure that the Special Committee considered the question of Puerto Rico. Since 1972, 27 resolutions had been adopted and forwarded to the General Assembly as part of the Special Committee's report and yet the question of Puerto Rico had still not been reopened for discussion in the General Assembly. The United Nations must acknowledge that the adoption of resolution 1514 (XV) had radically changed the situation and reopen the General Assembly's discussion on Puerto Rico. The Puerto Rican people's inalienable right to independence must be defended.

51. Lastly, she paid tribute to the Puerto Rican political prisoners Oscar López Rivera, Carlos Alberto Torres and Avelino González Claudio.

52. *Ms. Reverón Collazo withdrew.*

53. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Hernández López (Frente Autonomista) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

54. **Mr. Hernández López** (Frente Autonomista) said that the United States of America had reneged on the promises it had made over 50 years earlier. It controlled Puerto Rican ports and airspace and obliged Puerto Rico to trade solely with it, while its corporations determined basic commodity prices. Worse still, it used its federal courts and power structures to control the election of Puerto Rican public officials. Such actions had left Puerto Rico economically dependent, with a huge social crisis and a population suffering from an identity crisis and low self-esteem.

55. The United Nations had also failed the Puerto Rican people, who were obliged to send their representatives on a yearly pilgrimage to the Committee without any tangible result. The Puerto Rican people deserved much better, especially from their fellow Latin Americans. He urged the Committee to refer the question of Puerto Rico's status to the General Assembly. In the meantime, the people of Puerto Rico were ready for a constitutional assembly that would enable them to claim what was rightly theirs.

56. , *Mr. Hernández López withdrew.*

57. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Román Espada (Coalición Puertorriqueña contra la Pena de Muerte) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

58. **Mr. Román Espada** (Coalición Puertorriqueña contra la Pena de Muerte) said that Puerto Rico was the only jurisdiction in the world in which, although the people had taken steps to ban the death penalty, including through legislation and the Constitution, such punishment was nonetheless imposed by virtue of United States legislation. It was also the only nation in which death penalty proceedings were conducted in a language different from the people's native tongue. Puerto Ricans could be extradited to face the death penalty anywhere in the United States of America even if the Government of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico opposed it.

59. Although there had been no death penalty convictions by federal courts, five such cases were pending in the Federal District Court of Puerto Rico. Moreover, since jury selection for death penalty cases was based on the candidates' comprehension of the English language, an overwhelming majority of the population was precluded from the selection process. The jury was therefore not representative of the Puerto Rican community.

60. He requested the Committee to recommend that the General Assembly should consider the serious conflict existing between Puerto Rico's right to self-determination and the application of the death penalty within its territory by the United States of America and to adopt a resolution demanding that the United States Government immediately stop application of the federal death penalty in Puerto Rico.

61. *Mr. Román Espada withdrew.*

62. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Villanueva Muñoz (Comité Pro Derechos Humanos de Puerto Rico) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

63. **Mr. Villanueva Muñoz** (Comité Pro Derechos Humanos de Puerto Rico) said that his organization had received thousands of letters from around the world requesting the release of Carlos Alberto Torres, Oscar López Rivera and Avelino González Claudio. Political prisoners existed because colonialism existed. International law defined colonialism as a crime, while federal law defined seditious conspiracy — in other words, the struggle against colonialism — as a crime.

64. The existence of a colonial regime had caused serious problems in Puerto Rico. Official unemployment stood at almost 15 per cent; over 700 murders were committed each year; tourism could not be developed as a viable industry; and agricultural products could not be protected. Furthermore, the federalization of criminal investigations meant that constitutional provisions on the death penalty, wiretapping and the right to bail were violated.

65. Thus far, there had been three referendums on Puerto Rico's political status. All had called for a change in status; not one had been addressed by the United States Government. Puerto Rico had wanted to establish a constitutional assembly on status, but colonialists had blocked it. Congress did nothing to encourage it either, allowing talk of a federal plebiscite that excluded the possibility of statehood. President Obama urged countries around the world to respect human rights, while maintaining a colonial regime in Puerto Rico. The existence in Puerto Rico of a Grand Jury seriously limited Puerto Ricans' civil liberties. The outcome of the referendum on the United States military presence in Vieques, meanwhile, had only been honoured partially.

66. A people whose Government was controlled by the Government of another country was a people subjected to colonialism. It was precisely against such injustice and human rights violations that Puerto Rico's political prisoners had fought.

67. *Mr. Villanueva Muñoz withdrew.*

68. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Paret Vélez (Colectivo de Trabajo por la Independencia de Puerto Rico) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

69. **Mr. Paret Vélez** (Colectivo de Trabajo por la Independencia de Puerto Rico) said that the problems facing Puerto Ricans were rooted in colonialism and had been accentuated by their current extreme-right Government. In addition to environmental degradation, loss of arable land and pollution due to capitalist-imperialist exploitation, Puerto Rico was suffering from an alarming increase in every kind of crime, including drug trafficking, murder and domestic violence, while the majority of its people wallowed in extreme poverty, was often unemployed and did not have adequate health care.

70. Their Government was a puppet of imperialism and had responded to the current economic crisis by disguised privatization and massive lay-offs in the pubic sector; it served the interests of the rich and of transnational capitalism and allowed foreign companies, including United States monopolies, to rule

over the media. An increasingly neo-fascist Puerto Rico was emerging, where organizations and institutions opposed to the colonial regime were persecuted, repressed and eliminated.

71. All those who, across party lines, were seeking the colony's independence demanded the liberation of Puerto Rican political prisoners in the United States of America as a basic political right. After 511 years of colonial government, it was high time for the people of the oldest and largest colony in the world to exercise its inalienable right to self-determination and independence. He urged that the issue should be discussed by the General Assembly in plenary.

72. *Mr. Paret Vélez withdrew.*

73. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Dátil (Soho Art Festival) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

74. **Ms. Dátil** (Soho Art Festival) said that, in its treatment of Puerto Rico, the United States of America had violated its own laws, in particular Public Law 82-4447, which provided that the contractual relationship between the archipelago and the United States of America could only be altered by mutual agreement between the parties, as well as the thirteenth and fourteenth Amendments to the Constitution, Public Law 600-1917, and articles V and XV of the Constitution. The relief urgently needed by the Puerto Rican people could only be ensured by amending Public Law 82-4447, resolving the matter of the military bases in the archipelago and earmarking funds to halt the trafficking in human beings and illegal drugs. Should there be no response to her petition within 30 days, she would institute international legal proceedings against the United States Government with a view to establishing a just form of government in Puerto Rico and obtaining monetary compensation for the illegal invasion of the archipelago and the killing by bombardment of thousands of its citizens.

75. *Ms. Dátil withdrew.*

76. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Manuel (Socialist Workers Party) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

77. **Mr. Manuel** (Socialist Workers Party) said that the people of Puerto Rico and workers and farmers in the United States of America had a common enemy, namely the United States billionaires. A successful fight for the colony's independence was therefore in the interests not only of the Puerto Rican people, but also of the vast majority of the people of the United States of America, where the attacks against workers and farmers were part of the imperialist rulers' broader war on the oppressed around the world.

78. He called on the United States Government to release all Puerto Rican political prisoners, as well as the Cuban Five, who continued to be in the front line of the United States class struggle. Revolutionary Cuba, which had shattered the lie that an oppressed people could not survive without help from the United States of America, had unwaveringly defended Puerto Rico's right to independence. The Committee's condemnation of Washington's colonial rule in Puerto Rico would serve the interests of the majority of United States citizens and of all those who were fighting for the right to self-determination.

79. *Mr. Manuel withdrew.*

80. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Luz Rexach (National Advancement for Puerto Rican Culture) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

81. **Ms. Luz Rexach** (National Advancement for Puerto Rican Culture) said that in 1917 the United States Congress had granted American citizenship to all Puerto Ricans; according to the United States Constitution, all United States citizens should have the same rights. Puerto Ricans were sent to war for the United States, but they could not vote to have representatives in the United States Congress.

82. Puerto Rico was not a colony, since it had an elected governor; the majority of its people wanted it to be the fifty-first State of the United States. Once Puerto Rico had achieved statehood, most of its people would not pay any federal income tax but would receive earned income credits. Thousands of federal jobs would thereby be created and many Puerto Ricans would return to the island. The voices of the three million Puerto Ricans in the United States mainland and the three and a half million on the island must be heeded, both for their own sake and in the interests of world peace.

83. *Ms. Luz Rexach withdrew.*

84. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Delgado Rodríguez (Alianza pro Libre Asociación Soberana) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

85. **Mr. Delgado Rodríguez** (Alianza pro Libre Asociación Soberana) said that Puerto Rico possessed all the qualities of a nation, including the continued use of its own language, Spanish, which was one of its bulwarks against assimilation into the United States. Its people were proud to assert their Puerto Rican nationality and should be granted sovereign status, particularly in view of the failure of the Associated Free State model. A mechanism was needed in order to put in place a new political relationship of friendship between the United States of America and Puerto Rico in the form of sovereign free association. It was time for the process of decolonization to begin. A transitional phase might be negotiated that would enable the colony to move in a period of 15 to 20 years from its current state of dependency to that of a sovereign nation. An important part of the negotiation should focus on the right to freedom of movement among citizens of Puerto Rico and the United States of America.

86. If the United States believed in self-determination for Puerto Rico, it must support the proposal for its status to be debated within the United Nations; it must recognize that its 1952 agreement with Puerto Rico had not been an agreement between two sovereign countries. Moreover, it imposed its laws unilaterally on the colony, including the death penalty, which was a violation of Puerto Rico's Constitution. It was time for the United States to join other countries in helping Puerto Rico to cease being a colony and forge its own future, with the support of the United Nations, which should monitor any referendum on status and ensure that the options offered to the people of Puerto Rico were in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 1541 (XV) and 2625 (XXV).

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.